

a year with(out) you by kdee

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Angst, F/M, Grief/Mourning, Pining, Sad Mike, soulmate-esque?

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Karen Wheeler, Lucas Sinclair, Max (Stranger Things), Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler

Relationships: Eleven/Mike Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-10-13

Updated: 2017-10-13

Packaged: 2022-04-02 01:42:41

Rating: General Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,027

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

He makes signs out of whispering trees, creaking floorboards and a broken walkie-talkie. He waits quietly while the world continues to spin, moving on without her – Mike hates that, hates that he has lost the most bright, burning star that he'd just begun to orbit.

a year with(out) you

Author's Note:

- Inspired by [The Sad Mike Chronicles](#) by IrisVioletta.

5 days.

Mike twists the top of the trash bag into a knot. Heaving it over the kitchen floor, he toes the door open, trudges down to the trashcans, and lifts the lid. The monotony of this day, empty of *her*, is already weighing down on him.

That's when he sees it.

A torn part of cardboard packaging for Eggos stuck to the inside of the metal lid. Mike freezes, his breath rushing out of his lungs.

And time seems to do the same around him.

Mom doesn't buy them anymore. She ate them every morning and I can't anymore. She preferred them over any other food, was so reluctant to eat anything else but these stupid waffles.

Mom doesn't buy them anymore.

Mike's chest drops simultaneously with the trash can lid, not even registering the loud metal *clang* on the ground. He stares and stares and stares into the dark expanse of the trashcan, pulse thudding in his head, realising this packaging is from when Eleven was *here*. It's only when the wind nips at his cheeks does he realize he's crying.

“Michael?” His mother calls from the house.

Mike still dimly registers the trash he still has to put away despite the blood swirling thickly around his head. He can't think. He hoists the trash bag up and all but hurls it in, almost losing his footing while doing so.

Then, breathing hard, he steps forward and picks up the can's lid, slams it on top. He needs to get her out his head before he loses it.

Lifting the lid a fraction above the trashcan, he does it again, and maybe he doesn't really want her out of his head. And again. And again, and again, and again, his vision blurring and the frosted metal biting into his hand and the image of a girl asking him to make a promise on a laboratory table in a quiet voice and she's gone, gone, *gone*—

Soft hands pull him away and back into the house.

1 week.

He's on the brink of sleep when he hears it under his pillow. A crackle.

Like the flare of a match, Mike is instantly awake and clutching the walkie-talkie, breathing "*El?*"

He can't hear anything other than his own gasping for nearly a few minutes, but he keeps his eyes squeezed shut and hopes. He needs it to be her. Even when ten minutes has passed, he whispers her name, like he's trying to coax her to speak. "I know you're there. *Please, El.*"

Please, please, please, he repeats, a mantra. His eyes are burning.

He repeats *please* until it doesn't sound like a word, until it sounds like a prayer.

2 weeks.

"If you're out there, just, please, give me a sign."

He waits.

He makes signs out of whispering trees, creaking floorboards and a broken walkie-talkie. He waits quietly while the world continues to spin, moving on without her – Mike hates that, hates that he has lost the most bright, burning star that he'd just begun to orbit.

3 weeks.

The only time he ventures into the woods to look for her, he gets lost whilst calling her name.

Every sound is amplified, and with his flashlight blinking in and out of existence he thinks he might *scream*—he'd made a rough map of the woods to *avoid* this exact situation. Lost in the woods where he first saw her.

Mike yells her name once more, throat now on fire.

And then he finally gives up, sitting down against a tree and the ground is—unnervingly hard. Icy cold almost immediately seeps into him. Mike wonders if maybe this is how cold she was when they met in that rain, with that thin t-shirt. How she felt when she had to spend the night here after knocking Lucas out. When they'd abandoned her. Mike feels abandoned.

He wonders whether El feels like she's abandoned him. If she's here.

If she's alive.

Mike's face crumbles in the dark and he doesn't bother to cover his face as his eyes spill over, his fingers instead clawing down into the dirt that El could've treaded. Or slept on. Or, in the other world, is harbouring her dead weight. He sucks in jagged breaths, muffling his sobs into his knees, fingers caked in mud and the ghost of a girl. Sobs himself into exhaustion.

He whimpers her name, asks her *why, why did you leave, why did you go to a place where I can't look for you?*

And then, by the light of his faulty flashlight, in a night that seems to never end, almost crawls his way through the trees and finds himself at the edge of the woods.

He collapses there, and finds himself swimming in a state of sleep that he never fully sinks into, the cold stinging against his wet eyes.

After a few minutes, or hours, or years, he is being roughly shaken and drowned in urgent questions, *why the hell... why didn't you talk to... why...*

And he can only answer with her name, because it's *her, it's for her.*

He's found at the end of his driveway. Mike can't remember how he got there.

7 months.

A drop of blood blooms onto the paper below him. Cursing, Mike pushes away his Chemistry paper and wipes his nose with the back of his hand, a long red streak neatly bisecting his hand from his knuckles to wrist. When he realises the bleeding won't stop, he sighs and abandons the homework to go to the bathroom.

This keeps happening.

Mike pushes open the bathroom door and his hand tightens on the handle when he catches a glimpse of himself in the cabinet mirror. Bloody nose, tired eyes, exactly like she did after using her powers, after fighting...

He turns to shut the door and has to lean his forehead on it for a couple of moments: the only thing he's been fighting is school. And maybe Dustin's and Lucas' attempts at wooing Max. Determinedly not looking at the mirror, Mike runs the tap and bends down to wash his face, the icy water waking him up and stopping any thoughts of her entering the fringes of his consciousness.

His eyes flicker to a streak of dirt on the edge of the sink as his hands leave his cheeks. Mike pauses, turns off the tap. He can see another smudge along the wall next to the sink, and knows that it must continue around to the door. Someone who's spent time in the dirt has used the sink to clean themselves up; they've done it in a hurry. Dirt from the woods. Holly's world is dominated by tea parties, not treasure hunts. The temperature in the bathroom drops

imperceptibly. A shift in the air.

Mike knows that he's giving up if he turns around.

He does, heart in his throat.

Then two eyes are swimming, the pretence of *moving on* stripped away, because there's nothing. He's staring at an empty space shapelessly filled with her absence. Mike squeezes his eyes shut in an attempt to stop her last words from pricking at him, his own name a thorn in his chest.

His nose continues to bleed. He tastes blood.

This keeps happening.

9 months.

The blanket has moved, he *knows* it has.

Mike sits in the fort, sometimes, when it becomes *really* bad, and folds all the blankets inside. Just so everything is neat when she comes back. If she comes back.

He's found a smaller, softer blanket in the laundry cabinet which she'd probably like. Baby pink. He avoids looking at the entire fort too often, but can't bear to take it down because it's the only thing he has left of her – the only thing that still has her presence intact. So if his chest is cleaved in two for the now occasional D&D campaign the group has, he can deal with it. The rest of the boys haven't commented on Mike moving seats so he doesn't have to face it.

Yet tonight is bad.

And when he comes down to the basement, he can see that the previously folded, baby pink blanket is now gone, the rest of the blankets creased and pulled, and he thinks he might throw up.

No one else comes down here other than him and the rest of the boys. No one sits in the fort other than Mike.

A surge of adrenaline overtakes him, and Mike nearly launches himself down the stairs on his way to grab the walkie-talkie. He grapples with the antenna for a moment before he clicks through to Lucas.

“Lucas, are you there? I think, I think she—“

“Mike?”

“I think she’s been here, El, the blanket’s been, just, it’s been moved,” Mike’s speech is garbled as his eyes spark around the room, waiting for something to happen, to float, a door to slam, “and no one else sits in here, Lucas—“

“Mike—“

“—looks like it’s been *sleep* on or something, it’s not warm or anything but I can just *tell*, it’s, it’s—“

“Mike.”

“Wh... What?” He’s breathless.

Lucas’ speech is gentle, but has an underlying flint hard edge.

“It’s a blanket, Mike.” Mike opens his mouth to respond, but as if he senses it, Lucas carries on. “I know you’re... waiting.”

Mike swallows.

You’re waiting for her to turn up, or for a sign that she’s still here—“

“Lucas—“

“Mike. We *all* miss her. We *all* want her back, even Will. But you can’t... do this to yourself, man. You can’t keep waiting like this.”

Mike doesn’t respond, his voice dried in his throat. His high has crashed, the room suddenly stiflingly small.

“Over and out.”

Instead of sleeping in his own bed, Mike wraps himself in his sleeping

bag and lets the sheets fall over the entrance so he's ensconced in darkness. He hopes the blanket is going to good use.

Chicago must be getting pretty cold.

11 and a half months.

It's getting darker in the evenings now. The wind is turning leaves from yellow to gold, thin and smelling of bonfire smoke.

"Sometimes I feel like I still see her."

Or maybe he's still in mourning like Nancy is, whenever that thick, black silence comes over her and she locks her door and doesn't eat for an entire day. His mother's frantic, helpless energy in those periods makes being in the house insufferable, like he's suffocating between both of their guilty consciences. Barb is still dead.

Hopper's face had given nothing away as he'd stopped by Mike with a gruff *how're you holding up* after visiting the Byers. *Holding up*. Mike still sometimes feels like the world is crashing around his ears and he's holding the shards of the sky in his hands after her last scream. Perhaps Hopper's eyes soften, or flicker uncomfortably, but Mike is immediately reminded of his friends. Forget it, Mike had told him. *You know you're going crazy.*

Because he keeps tasting blood at the back of his throat. He keeps hearing whispers in the rustle and crush of the just turning leaves. Keeps getting drawn back into her fort. He sees the glare of city lights behind his eyes when he goes to sleep and feels lost when he wakes up.

He thinks he's going crazy.

12 months.

Mike knows El wouldn't want this. Wouldn't want him to waste away like, become a shell of who he used to be. A dead autumn leaf

waiting to be crushed.

He hates that he thinks about her like a dead girl.

Or a weapon, used against her will, or a girl who didn't know what a friend was, who left without knowing how much she was loved. What it meant to be loved.

Mike hates that he's forgetting her. Her voice, her smile, her tears.

She's becoming a eulogy.

When Will starts to leave the room too quickly, is going to the doctor more frequently, Mike starts to think that they are all getting dragged into another nightmare. One that she can't save them from, not this time.

Not without coming back first.

Author's Note:

if you haven't read 'the sad mike chronicles', do it!
it's probably my favourite st fic.

this fic is based on the theory that eleven is hiding out in chicago (and helped by hopper). the original draft of this was much more soulmate-esque/psychic! mike, which you can find in the 'inspired by' section! that idea was inspired by a short shot in the superbowl trailer, where i fancied that mike crying glitches to el, who is crying in the same place.

hope i didn't overload anyone with mike!grief, but i think we're all a sucker for it. my tumblr is @gohawkins if you'd like to follow me!

tell me what you think. :-)

Works inspired by this one:

- [half here, half vicarious](#) by kdee